DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 209 821 EC 140 335

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TITLE Career Attitudes of the Learning Disabled Adolescent: Research Suggestions and Practices.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 36p.: Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of The Council for Exceptional Children (59th, New York, NY, April 12-17, 1981, Session A-4).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Career Choice; *Learning Disabilities; *Mainstreaming; Secondary Education; *Student Attitudes; *Student Placement; Vocational Education; *Vocational Maturity

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the extent to which four groups (N=50 in each group) of learning disabled (LD) adolescents differed on career attitudes as related to making a sound career decision. Ss included 50 LD students enrolled in regular secondary classes, 50 LD students enrolled in secondary LD classes, 50 LD students enrolled in secondary vocational training classes, and 50 LD students enrolled in regular secondary classes and receiving additional resource center support beyond that ordinarily provided in regular classes. The attitude scale of the Career Maturity Inventory was used to determine career attitudes. Results suggested that LD adolescents in regular classes were superior to the other groups studied in career attitudes. An additional finding was that significant differences in career attitudes exist in the four LD groups. (Author/SB)

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Career Attitudes of the Learning Disabled Adolescent: Research Suggestions and Practices

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The education of the learning disabled adolescent is a priority issues for professionals and parents (Goodman, 1978; Kendall, 1981a; Mann, Goodman, & Wiederholt, 1978; Wiig & Semel, 1976). Several facts help to explain why this is so. First it has become painfully apparent that many pupils who were diagnosed in the elementary school as learning disabled, have not responded adequately to treatment efforts provided during their earlier grades (Adelman, 1971; Frierson, 1976; Zigmond, 1978). Second, historically, school systems and professionals have directed their initial efforts toward learning disabilities in the upper elementary grades (DeRuiter, Ferrell, & Kass, 1975, Deshler, 1978; Lerner, Evans, & Meyers, 1977; Mori, 1980; Myklebust & Boshes, 1969; Touzel, 1978). Third, recent Federal Legislation (Public Law 94-142, 1975) and state Due Process regulations mandate that services be provided for these students (Abeson & Zettel, 1977; Ballard & Zettel, 1977; Bryan & Bryan, 1978; Hayes & Higgins, 1978; Hudson & Graham, 1978; Kendall, 1978).

Career education for learning disabled adolescents has become one of the most pressing concerns in the field of learning disa-

EC 140 335

bilities (Kendall, 1979; Renzulli, 1977). Because of the eligibility criteria that restrict services to the more severely handicapped, learning disabled students have not ordinarily been able to avail themselves of those programs (Kendall, 1980). Also, literature relative to career preparation for the learning disabled has been minute (Brutten, 1966; Colella, 1973; Irving, 1975; Kameny, 1967; Lurie, 1967; Martin, 1967; Schweich, 1975; Sunberg, 1970; Washburn, 1975; Weening, 1969; Williamson, 1974-75). Consequently, programs in the secondary school are being reviewed from a variety of sources (Cegelka, 1979; Goodman, 1978; Irvine, Goodman, & Mann, 1978; Marsh, Gearheart, & Gearheart, 1975; Mercer & Mercer, 1981; Strother, 1974).

Professionals now have the benefit of critiques of secondary school programming and are alert to their misgivings (Cruickshank, 1977; Deshler, 1978; Goodman & Mann,, 1975, Larsen, 1978; McNutt & Heller, 1978; Mercer, 1979), many of which must be avoided in structuring career education designs for learning disabled adolescents. As new programs are developed and before implementation becomes finalized, it is important that a variety of career education practices be examined. Specifically, this study investigated the extent to which four groups of learning disabled adolescents differed on career attitudes as related to making a sound career decision. The null hypothesis of no difference was formulated.

Overview

Career attitudes refer to the affective rather than intellectual reactions of individuals toward career choice. Incorporated in the concept are the person's feelings related to involvement in the career choice process, orientation toward work, independence in decision making, preference for career choice factors, and conceptions of the career choice process. Several studies (e.g., Asbury, 1967; Bovee, 1967; Gilliland, 1966; Goodson, 1969), suggest that career counseling, both individual and group, can enhance career attitude maturity.

It is important that career education programs for learning disabled adolescents emphasize career attitudes in regard to occupational choice, as well as preparation in specific job related skills (Bingham, 1978). Although several studies have focused on career education for exceptional children (Brolin, 1977; Brolin & D'Alonzo, 1979; Gysbers & Moore, 1975; Gysbers & West, 1975; Hansen, 1977; Hoyt, 1976; Miller, 1973; Phelps & Lutz, 1977) few have questioned whether adolescents with learning disabilities have incorporated attitudes about themselves that are reflective of their eventual work behaviors. Of those that have been reported (D'Alonzo & Miller, 1977; Lerner, et. al., 1977; Levy, 1973; Marland, Litchenwald, & Burke, 1975; Wallace & Larsen, 1978) conclude that instructional approaches to the learning disabled adolescent must emphasize relevancy of affective and career educational components.

The two major problems in choosing an occupation which arise in the course of career development during the high school years are indecision and unrealism. Approximately 30 per cent of high school seniors are undecided about what they want to do, and a similar percentage are unrealistic in their choices (Crites, 1969). Accordingly, it would appear that almost two-thirds of those completing their secondary education are coping ineffectively with the task of selecting a life's work and hence can be considered career immature.

There is good reason, therefore, to identify learning disabled adolescents who are career immature as early as possible in the decision-making years. Clearly, there is a guidance need among these students for experiences that develop positive career attitudes which will assist them in becoming more career mature.

Research Suggestions

The necessity to implement learning disability programs at the secondary level is so urgent that programs are rapidly emerging in secondary schools in spite of the lack of research, assessment instruments, appropriate materials, and teachers trained for work with learning disabled adolescents (Lerner, et. al., 1977).

Research is needed in career education for learning disabled adolescents in order to appropriately facilitate educational programs that provide comprehensive preparation for the world of work (Izard, 1977; Meyen & Deshler, 1978; Porter, 1980; Saski &

Wiederholt, 1978). As special educators immerse themselves in the design of research on learning disabled adolescents they often tend to ignore current trends and issues in secondary education as a whole (Deshler, 1978). Since learning disabilities are largely an educational phenomenon and problem (Larsen, 1978), special educators must become alert to events in secondary schools in general and make programming and research decisions within that context.

Learning Disabled Adolescents in Resource Centers

Recent legislation mandating educational services for handicapped children and a professional commitment to mainstreaming have encouraged the development of resource programs in place of, and occasionally in addition to, the more traditional self-contained model. Consequently, the volume of literature describing the learning resource model as a special education delivery system has increased rapidly over the last decade (D'Alonzo, D'Alonzo, & Mauser, 1979; Gickling, Murphy, & Mallory, 1979; Hammill & Wiederholt, 1972; Hawisher & Calhoun, 1978; Jenkins & Mayhall, 1973; Lance, 1975; McLoughlin & Kass, 1978; Reger, 1972; Sargent, 1981; Swart, 1979; Wiederholt, Hammill & Brown, 1978).

While the efficacy of programs offered through the resource model is equivocal, (Brandt, 1972; Brandt, 1975; Ito, 1980; Ito, 1981; Pepe, 1974; Sabatino, 1971; Semmel, 1975; Sindelar & Deno, 1978), a pattern of flaws have been reported in the conceptualization of services offered to LD students through this design

(Burgett & Dodge, 1976; Cruickshank, 1974, 1977; Gickling and Theobald, 1975; Harris & Mahar, 1975; Jenkins & Mayhall, 1976; Kendall, 1980; Payne & Murray, 1974; Shotel, Iano & McGettigan, 1972; Speece & Mandell, 1980). Furthermore, efforts to offer services to LD students with other handicaps almost exclusively through the resource room model suggest a need for study (Cruickshank, 1977).

Vocational Training Programs

Recent federal mandates encourage the need for appropriate vocational educational and employment opportunity for the handicapped (Davis & Weintraub, 1978; Hightower, 1975; Levitan & Taggart, 1976; Razeghi & Davis, 1979; Sitlington, 1979). However, in reality, special education has not yet developed a strong, well developed programmatic effort for learning disabled adolescents. Historically, special education teachers have not been professionally prepared to develop or implement secondary level programs that address the issue of employment (Brolin, 1973; Clark & Olverson, 1973; Gillet, 1978; Malouf & Halpern, 1976; Miller, Sabatino, & Larsen, 1980).

If learning disabled adolescents are to receive the full advantage of existing vocational programs, the best possible match must be made between the individual and the program or job placement. The match between abilities and program or job requirements is particularly crucial for learning disabled individuals because

they may lack some of the flexibility to compensate for and adjust to programs or jobs in which they are not fully qualified.

Learning Disability Classes

Public Law 94-142 requires federal, state, and district officials to provide data on the number of children served, including number of children mainstreamed, number removed from self-contained classes, etc. While this information has its purposes it is also among the most useless, primarily because of issues that it does not address, for example, the appropriateness of the alternative educational placement and resulting improvement (or lack of it) in outcomes presumed to accompany mainstream placement (Jones, Gottlieb, Guskin, & Yoshida, 1978). Many of the learning disabled students presently being served in learning disability classes were formerly in classes for the educable mentally retarded. The substitution of one setting for another may be harmful (Jones, 1977; Kendall, 1981b).

Method

Subjects

Two hundred subjects were chosen from twelve high schools in the inner city of a large metropolitan area. The test subjects were randomly selected so that a cross section of male-female, and black-white were represented. The majority of the population is made up of members of lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The Wechsler

Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) was used to determine the intellectual classification range for participants in this sample.

The four groups included: (a) 50 LD students enrolled in secondary regular classes, (b) 50 LD students enrolled in secondary learning disability classes, (c) 50 LD students enrolled in secondary vocational training classes, and (d) 50 LD students integrated in secondary regular classes and receiving additional support beyond that ordinarily provided in regular classes through learning resource centers. Only subjects who had been assigned to the identified setting for a period of at least two years were included in the study. Additional subject characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Procedure

The attitude scale of the Career Maturity Inventory (Crites, 1978) was used to determine career attitudes. The inventory evaluates the maturity of attitudes that are critical in realistic career decision making. The attitude scale elicits the feelings, subjective reactions, and dispositions that the individual has toward making a career choice and entering the world of work. Is work seen as a meaningful focus of life or is it viewed as drudgery? How involved and independent is the individual in the choice process? What considerations are made in selecting a career? These and other conative aspects of decision making are stated in the items of the Attitude Scale as they have actually been

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations (SD_s) for Chronological Age (CA)[a] Career Attitude[b] and IQ[c] for the Four Groups

Groups	CA[a]		Career Attitude[b]		IQ[c]	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Regular	171.06	12.88	44.19	4.86	84.54	7.64
Learning Disability	183.32	16.98	37.99	4.11	82.36	7.64
Vocational	188.98	17.38	42.31	4.31	83.90	7.16
Resource Center	177.68	11.60	43.18	6.23	83.18	9.01

Note. [a]In Months.

[b]Career Maturity Inventory.

[c]Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised.

verbalized by young people. More specifically, five attitudinal variables are surveyed: decisiveness in career decision making; involvement in career decision making; independence in career decision making; orientation to career decision making; and compromise in career decision making.

The Attitude Scale is a 75-item true or false survey questionnaire, which can be administered on an individual or group basis. For this study, the attitude scale was administered in groups of seven to ten. Prior to the administration of the instrument, rapport was established with each group of testees by discussing the general nature of the test. Attitude testing was begun and completed during the fall 1980.

Validity of Instrument

A basic utility of the attitude scale is its validity as an operational definition of the Career Choice Attitudes dimension in career maturity (Carek, 1965; Crites, 1974; Crites, 1965; Crites & Semler, 1967; Day, 1975; Goodson, 1969; Hollender, 1964; Kelso, 1975; Kershner & Blair, 1975; LoCascio, 1964; LoCascio, 1967; Texas Education Agency, 1973; Walsh & Hanley, 1975), which has been used extensively to test hypothesis stemming from career development theory.

Results

The data were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance. Significant differences were found among the means of the career

attitude scores of the four groups ($F=15.17$, 3/196 df, $p < .05$). Table 2 presents these results. Therefore, the hypothesis of no difference was rejected. Additional analyses of these findings were proformed for all pairwise combinations of the means by usage of a critical t-Test. Means compared were: (a) regular LD group vs. learning resource group; (b) regular LD group vs. vocational training group; (c) regular LD group vs. learning disability group; (d) learning disability group vs. learning resource group; (e) learning disability group vs. vocational training group, and (f) vocational training group vs. learning resource group. Table 3 presents the results of differences between the various means.

Analyses of the career attitude scores for the four groups revealed significant critical differences between the regular vs. learning disability, learning disability vs. learning resource center, and learning disability vs. vocational training group means. No significant difference was revealed between the regular vs. learning resource center, regular vs. vocational training, and vocational training vs. learning resource group means. The means and standard deviations (SD_s) for each of the five attitude subscales of the Career Maturity Inventory for each group are illustrated in Table 4.

Discussion

Investigation has shown that career attitude of learning disabled adolescents in learning disability classes were lower than

TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance of Career Attitude Variables for the Four Groups

Source	SS	df	Ms	F
Total	5918.98	199		
Between	1115.68	3	371.89	15.17*
Within	4803.3	196	24.51	

* $< .05$

TABLE 3

Results of Critical Differences Between Groups

Group	df	Career Attitude Mean Diff.	C. diff.
Regular Resource Center	196	1.01	1.95
Regular Vocational	196	1.88	1.95
Regular Learning Disability	196	6.20	1.95*
Learning Disability Resource Center	196	5.19	1.95*
Learning Disability Vocational	196	4.32	1.95*
Vocational Resource Center	196	.87	1.95

Note. There were significant critical differences between three pairs of the means tested for the four groups.

*P $<$ .05

TABLE 4

Means and Standard Deviations (SD_s) for Each of the Attitude Subscales of the Crites Maturity Inventory for Each of the Four Groups

Groups	Decisiveness in Career Decision Making		Involvement in Career Decision Making		Independence in Career Decision Making		Orientation to Career Decision Making		Compromise in Career Decision Making	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Regular	46.48	8.60	40.04	8.09	43.94	6.12	44.44	9.04	46.04	7.80
Learning Disability	44.72	6.19	32.02	5.90	36.78	7.70	39.44	7.20	36.94	5.57
Vocational	46.66	8.00	37.96	4.52	42.36	6.88	43.06	8.08	42.66	6.24
Resource Center	44.86	7.25	40.44	9.38	43.38	8.73	43.06	9.17	42.82	8.72

that of learning disabled adolescents in regular, vocational training, and learning resource center groups. This finding appears to support the positions of Jones (1977) and Kendall (1981b) that the substitution of one setting for another may be harmful. Since many of the learning disabled students presently being served in learning disability classes were formerly in classes for the educable mentally retarded, it seems appropriate that the nature of their attitudes be taken into account.

The vocational training classes demonstrated lower career attitude scores that the regular and learning resource groups. This was so even with an emphasis on career preparation. This finding is supportive of reports of (Miller, Sabatino, & Larsen, 1980), that special education teachers have not been professionally prepared to develop or implement secondary level programs that address the issue of employment.

A significant career attitude difference was revealed between the regular and learning disability, learning disability and learning resource, and learning disability and vocational training group subjects. An additional finding in the present study was that career attitude scores for the regular and learning resource, regular and vocational training, and vocational training and learning resource groups did not differ significantly.

Career attitude for the learning disabled adolescent is an issue of concern in the field of learning disabilities. Therefore, it

seems appropriate to review several of the obstacles to such a goal. First, the movement toward career education will fail if professionals working at the secondary level do not facilitate pedagogical activities for adolescents that include skills for coping with daily living, occupational preparation, and psychosocial problems. Second, there must be cooperative career education planning between secondary learning disability and regular classroom teachers. Third, it is essential that the availability of specific secondary special education teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities in the United States be facilitated.

Results of this study lend support to regular classes as the most efficacious in career attitudes of learning disabled adolescents. However, since small mean differences were observed between several of the groups studies, additional research is needed before definite conclusions can be varified.

In summary, it has been suggested that significant differences in career attitude of learning disabled adolescents exist in secondary regular, learning disability, vocational, and learning resource groups. This finding would suggest that learning disabled adolescents exhibit immaturity in the important attitudes associated with career choice. If the education profession is to serve all children well, it will take courage, integrity, understanding, and ethics to state clearly what constitutes valid practice. Providing

learning disabled adolescents with programs that develop appropriate career attitudes is not a benevolent act but a prerequisite for valid professional competence.

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